

The Miracle of North Platte, Nebraska

CFC Story of the Week -- Week 2

The miracle of North Platte, Nebraska, began with a mix-up. One winter night early in World War II, residents went to the train station with baskets of presents and food. Rumor had it that many of their sons would be on a troop train that would stop there for 10 minutes before taking them off to war. The train they waited for, however, was filled with weary and homesick soldiers from Kansas instead. The spirits of these troops still soared when they were greeted with the presents and food the town had prepared, and soon the glow on their faces warmed the sad and worried hearts of North Platte.

One woman taken by what happened wrote to the local newspaper to suggest that North Platte do the same for every troop train that came through town. America was in the war together, and every soldier on the trains was their soldier. It was an audacious proposal, since many troop trains stopped there each day between 5:00 am and midnight, and North Platte was a small town with only 12,000 residents. Furthermore, food was being rationed there like everywhere in the country. The town, however, rallied around the idea and quickly put a canteen in the train station. As word spread, surrounding towns pitched in to help. Even President Roosevelt sent a contribution.



Sgt. Edward Gomer, Brooklyn, NY and Marine
Pvt. Betty Wakefield, San Francisco, CA at the
lunch counter with milk.

Photo Courtesy of [Union Pacific Railroad](#)

During the war, the North Platte Canteen provided free fried chicken, sandwiches, fresh-baked goods, magazines, and comfort to over 6 million soldiers. Many of them were young recruits who had never traveled from home before and didn't know if they would ever see it again. After being cramped in a train for days -- unable to shower or eat anything but cold rations -- the kindness they found in North Platte was overwhelming. It reminded them of what they were fighting for, and the memory kept them going throughout the war. Even today, former soldiers send letters to the town to say thank you for the 10 minutes they spent there 60 years ago.

Trains no longer stop in North Platte, and many cynics wonder if a community would ever do so much for so many again. Year after year, however, Federal employees continue to show they care for

others by contributing to charities through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). Like the efforts of the citizens of North Platte, the contributions of Federal employees add up and do a world of good for millions of people. Last year, Federal workers in the Washington area contributed over 50 million dollars to help others in need.

You can help us this year by filling out a pledge card today. For more information, talk with your CFC keyworker. You can also find your favorite charity using our [online catalog](#) and fill out your pledge card online. Together, we can make a difference!

To learn more about the North Platte Canteen, check out the new book by Bob Greene: *Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen*, published by William Morrow & Co., New York, May 28, 2002.

About the CFC Stories of the Week

Each week of the campaign, we will share a story that shows you how your CFC contribution can touch the lives of people you care about. We will mention a few charities along the way, but there are 3,000 charities in the CFC Catalog of Caring. More than one CFC charity can help you make a difference to the people and causes you believe in. **[We encourage you to consider all the possibilities.](#)**

[Read More CFC Stories](#)

[NIH CFC Home](#)